

20 December 2012

## **North Nowra Link Road – Concept Plan**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Concept Plan application seeks approval for a new link road connecting Illaroo Road at North Nowra with the Princes Highway at Bomaderry. The application was referred to the Planning Assessment Commission for determination as it meets Ministerial delegation.

The Concept Plan proposed three route options comprising the northern, central and southern alignments. The Department recommended that the northern and southern route options be approved. The Department did not support the central option based primarily on adverse biodiversity impacts.

Following careful consideration of the views expressed at the public meeting, the Department's Assessment Report as well as public and agency submissions, the Commission agrees with the Department's assessment that the central option should not be approved. However, after carefully considering the merits of both the northern and southern routes, the Commission has determined that only the northern route should be approved.

In summary, the Commission considers that the northern route has the least environmental impacts of the two options. Further, approving one route only will provide more certainty for all stakeholders and will finally resolve a long standing issue for the wider community.

The report below provides further detail on the Commission's decision making process and outlines the reasons for the amendments made to the Concept Plan approval.

### **PROPOSAL**

This application seeks Concept Plan approval for a new link road to connect the suburbs of North Nowra and Bomaderry. The subject area is situated approximately 3 kilometres from Nowra CBD, on the northern side of the Shoalhaven River.

The Concept Plan application comprises three options for the link road including the central, southern and northern options connecting Illaroo Road at North Nowra with the Princes Highway at Bomaderry. The road would cover a distance of between 1.7-1.8 kilometres.

All three route options would pass over Bomaderry Creek and part of the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park, managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The objectives of the proposal are to: reduce congestion at the Illaroo/Princes Highway intersection; reduce congestion and improve safety and amenity on Illaroo Road; and provide infrastructure to accommodate growth in the area.

Brief descriptions of the proposed routes are outlined below:

- **The Central Route Option** - would link the existing Illaroo Road / Pitt Street intersections with the existing Narang Road / Princes Highway intersection. The road would cross the central portion of the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park for a distance of approximately 600 metres. This option has a Capital Investment Value (CIV) of \$13.0 million.

- **The Southern Route Option** - would link Illaroo Road (new intersection 80 metres north of the existing Illaroo Road and Falcon Crescent intersection) with the existing West Bunberra Street / Princes Highway intersection. The road would cross the south eastern extremity of the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park for a distance of less than 100 metres. This option has a CIV of \$18.5 million.
- **The Northern Route Option** - would link the existing Illaroo Road / West Cambewarra Road intersection with the existing Moss Vale Road / Elvin Drive intersection. The road would run parallel to the existing West Cambewarra Road and cross the north western corner of the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park for a distance of approximately 250 metres. This option has a CIV of \$14.3 million.

Shoalhaven Council's (the Proponent) initial preferred option was the central route. However, Council has since advised that their preferred option is now the northern route.

A further detailed description of the proposal and its background is contained in the Department's environmental assessment report.

### **DELEGATION TO THE COMMISSION**

The project was referred to the Commission for determination under the terms of the Ministerial delegation dated 14 September 2011 as the Proponent is a local authority.

Mr Garry West and Mr David Johnson were nominated as the Commission members for the project. Mr Garry West chaired the Commission.

### **DEPARTMENT'S ASSESSMENT REPORT**

On 14 November 2012, the Commission received the Director-General's Environmental Assessment Report. The report provided a detailed assessment of key issues including:

- Strategic justification;
- Traffic; and
- Fauna and flora impacts.

The report also considered noise impacts, aboriginal heritage, historic heritage, visual amenity, flooding, soil and water and contaminated land.

The department received a total of 170 submissions during the exhibition of the Environmental Assessment. This comprised 4 submissions from public authorities and 166 submissions from the general public and special interest groups. The submissions expressed views both in support and against the link road options.

Key issues raised during the exhibition period included:

- Supports the project in principle;
- Supports the northern option;
- Supports the central option;
- The proposal should preserve Bomaderry Creek Regional Park;
- Central option would destroy threatened species;
- Central option would detrimentally impact on fauna;
- Northern option would have a lesser environmental impact;
- Central option would result in fragmentation of Bomaderry Creek Regional Park;
- Objects on environmental and ecological grounds;
- The proposal would not improve traffic;
- Objects to project in principle;
- Northern option would have a lesser impact on flora and fauna;
- Loss of amenity to picnic area and Park generally;
- Detrimental impacts on Aboriginal heritage;

- Objects to biodiversity offsets; and
- Central option follows existing service road.

The Department's assessment report concluded that the northern and southern options are justified and in the public interest as they would have the least environmental impact. The Department did not support the central option based primarily on biodiversity impacts.

The Department recommended approval of the southern and northern routes subject to recommended future assessment requirements to ensure impacts associated with the proposal would be appropriately assessed and managed.

## **Meetings with Key Stakeholders**

### Shoalhaven Council

On 10 December 2012, the Commission met with Council officers, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to discuss the application. The following issues were discussed at the meeting:

- A description of the background of the proposal;
- Council's favoured position on the road alignment;
- The strategic land use planning undertaken for the wider area including the Nowra-Bomaderry Structure Plan and Council's Comprehensive LEP;
- The proposed Illaroo Road to Moss Vale Road link road;
- The broader road network and traffic issues facing the area and possible solutions; and
- The need for greater flexibility in the alignment of the road corridors.

The Commission also inspected the general site area with Council officers.

### Public Meeting

The Commission held a public meeting on 10 December 2012 to hear the public's views on the Department's assessment report and recommendation. Seven people spoke at the Commission meeting (see Appendix 1).

The key issues raised at the meeting included:

- The southern route option would pass over the deepest part of Bomaderry Creek gorge; threaten biodiversity including Coachwood/Ironwood Warm Temperate Rainforest EEC, the grey-headed flying fox, orchids species and the yellow-bellied glider; have greater visual, noise and traffic impacts; require disturbance of contaminated land and involve acquisition of properties;
- All options have negligible differences in terms of total distances travelled;
- The link road will not solve wider traffic issues particularly congestion at the bridge over the Shoalhaven River;
- All three options will not meet objectives of reducing congestion at the Illaroo/Princes Highway intersection, reduce congestion and improve safety and amenity on Illaroo Road and provide infrastructure to accommodate growth in the area;
- Waste of money;
- The link road serves only a few;
- The Nowra-Bomaderry Structure Plan identifies the Illaroo Road to Mossvale Road link which is a better option;
- Inadequate traffic modelling;
- Alleged errors in assessment report;
- Lack of fauna and flora surveys to inform assessment;
- Impact on habitat rather than individuals species;
- Proposed routes bisect the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park; and
- Need to maintain and protect the Bomaderry Creek Regional Park for amenity of local residents, a place to study and cultural activities.

### Department of Planning and Infrastructure

On 14 December 2012, the Commission was briefed by officers from the Department of Planning.

The key issues discussed at the meeting included:

- Whether there is any flexibility in the alignment of the road corridors illustrated in the Concept Plan;
- The southern route has more issues than the northern route including fauna and flora impacts, aboriginal heritage issues, contamination from the old tip site and acquisition of properties. The southern route was however deemed to be acceptable subject to mitigation measures to address these issues;
- The northern route has the least environmental impacts of the two options;
- The southern alignment has not been referred to the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water Population and Communities for comment; and
- The southern route is more expensive to construct than the northern route.

### **COMMISSION'S COMMENTS**

The Commission considers that the Department's assessment report and recommendations adequately address the majority of issues raised at the public meeting. Further, many of the detailed design issues raised at the public meeting will be considered during the assessment of a future development application for the link road.

Notwithstanding, the Commission gave further consideration to the following issues:

- 1) Whether two route options should be approved; and
- 2) The merits of the northern and southern route options.

### Approval of Two Route Options

The Department recommended that both the northern and southern link road options be approved. This would allow Council to seek future approval to construct either the northern or southern alignment consistent with the requirements of the Concept Plan approval.

The Commission heard from speakers at the public meeting that the North Nowra Link Road was a long standing issue that needed to be resolved. Further, the majority of speakers favoured approval of the northern route option only.

The Commission questioned the recommendation to approve two routes and noted there was a lack of compelling reasons offered to justify why the Commission should approve two options, rather than the best available option.

After careful consideration, the Commission has formed the view that the Concept Plan approval should provide more certainty by approving a single route only. This will provide greater certainty for all stakeholders and will finally resolve a long standing issue for the wider community. Approving two options would simply lead to ongoing and unnecessary uncertainty about the location of the link road.

### Northern / Southern Route Options

The majority of speakers at the public meeting raised concerns regarding the recommended southern alignment. In particular, concern was raised about the southern option as it would:

- have the greatest impact on fauna and flora;
- pass over the deepest part of the Bomaderry Creek gorge;
- disturb contaminated land; and
- be the most expensive to construct.

At the same time, many speakers supported the northern alignment as it would have the least environmental impact of the two options.

The Commission has considered the merits of both the northern and southern routes and believes that only the northern route should be approved. The rationale for the Commission's decision is as follows:

- The northern route has the least environmental impacts of the two options;
- There are negligible time/travel differences between the two options. The total distance between the southern and northern routes along Illaroo Road is less than 1km;
- The northern route would avoid significant fragmentation of bushland;
- The northern route currently passes by fewer houses than the southern route;
- The northern route is the least expensive to construct; and
- Council have stated that they favour the northern route.

Of the two options, the Commission considers that the northern option will be the best performing in terms of its impacts on biodiversity. The Commission notes that the southern route would potentially impact on the Grey-Headed Flying Fox maternity camp, the Yellow-Bellied Glider, the Bauer's Midge Orchid and the Coachwood/Ironwood Warm Temperate Rainforest EEC. The Commission also notes that the Office of Environment and Heritage considers that the northern option would have the least impact on threatened species.

The Commission also raises concern about the southern route directing additional traffic towards a new intersection on the Princes Highway opposite the Nowra Anglican College. The Commission understands that there is already a congestion issue near the College and additional traffic would potentially impact on safety at this location.

Further, the southern route would potentially disturb contaminated land associated with the old North Nowra landfill and it also passes over the deepest part of the Bomaderry Creek gorge.

The Commission considers that the northern route is the best option as it clearly has the least environmental impact of the two options and will still meet the overall objectives of the proposal.

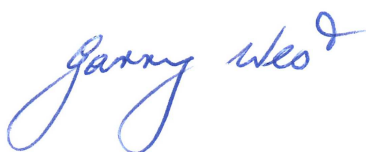
Whilst it is acknowledged that the link road will ease traffic congestion at the Illaroo Road/Princes Highway intersection, the link road will not be the only solution required to address congestion at this intersection. Reducing congestion at the Illaroo Road/Princes Highway intersection will require a suite of measures to be implemented in addition to the link road.

The Commission also notes that the Nowra-Bomaderry Structure Plan identifies the Illaroo Road to Moss Vale Road link road, which is located a short distance to the north of the North Nowra Link Road. However, this does not form part of the Commission's consideration. The Commission can only deal with the current application before it.

#### **COMMISSION'S DETERMINATION**

The Commission has carefully considered the views expressed at the public meeting, the Department's Assessment Report and agency and public submissions.

On balance, the Commission considers that only the northern option for the North Nowra Link Road should be approved for the reasons outlined above.



**Commission Member**



**Commission Member**

## **Appendix 1 List of Speakers**

### **Planning Assessment Commission Meeting**

Date & Time: Monday 10 December 2012, 3 pm

Place: Nowra Golf & Recreation Club, Fairway Drive, North Nowra.

#### **Speakers:**

1. Australasian Native Orchid Society  
Mr Alan Stephenson
2. The Shoalhaven branch of the Australian Conservation Foundation  
Mr Terry Barratt
3. The Friends of Bomaderry Creek  
Mr Robin Moyes
4. Mr Gary Tearle
5. Mr Mike Leggett
6. Ms Frances Bray
7. Ms Lyn Whitbread